

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

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1. A computer-based method, comprising collecting, through a series of iterative customer submissions and vendor responses, sufficient information concerning a custom manufacturing project so as to produce a sufficiently constrained job request as to allow at least one of the vendors to submit a quote for the project.
 2. The computer-based method of claim 1 wherein the submissions and responses are made through Web forms.
 3. The computer-based method of claim 1 wherein the custom manufacturing project comprises a print job.
 4. The computer-based method of claim 1 wherein collecting comprises incrementally adding constraints to an initially under-constrained job request to produce the sufficiently constrained job request.
 5. A computer-based service configured to allow a customer and one or more vendors to interact with one another in defining a task description for a custom manufacturing project by permitting the customer to specify, in an initially under constrained fashion, the task description and further permitting the vendors and the customer to successively develop the task description to a fully constrained form through an iterative process in which one or more constraints on the task description are added, removed and/or modified during each iteration.
 6. The computer-based service of claim 5 wherein the customer is further permitted to vary information regarding the task description on a vendor-by-vendor basis.

1 7. The computer-based service of claim 5 wherein the fully constrained form of the task
2 description includes payment and delivery terms.

1 8. The computer-based service of claim 5 wherein the customer and the vendors interact
2 through a series of notification messages transmitted via a Web server.

1 9. The computer-based service of claim 8 wherein the Web server is configured to store
2 vendor-specific instances of the task description, each accessible by the customer.

1 10. The computer-based service of claim 9 wherein the Web server is further configured to
2 provide vendor-specific views of the initially unconstrained task description specified by
3 the customer.

1 11. The computer-based service of claim 10 wherein the Web server is further configured to
2 provide a customer-oriented view of multiple ones of the vendor-specific instances of the
3 task description upon request.

1 12. A computer-based task description, comprising a set of constraints arrived at through an
2 iterative process in which a customer and one or more vendors successively define criteria
3 for completing the task defined by the description, the criteria including payment and
4 delivery terms sufficient to support a binding contractual obligation.

1 13. The computer-based task description of claim 12 wherein the task comprises a custom
2 manufacturing job.

1 14. The computer-based task description of claim 12 wherein the task comprises a print job.

1 15. A Web server configured to allow a customer and one or more vendors to define one or
2 more instances of a task description for a custom manufacturing project by permitting the
3 customer to specify, in an initially under constrained fashion, the task description and further

4 permitting the vendors and the customer to successively develop the task description to a
5 fully constrained form through an iterative process in which one or more constraints on the
6 task description are added, removed and/or modified during each iteration.

1 16. The Web server of claim 15 wherein the customer and the vendors are permitted to add,
2 remove and/or modify the task description through the use of Web forms.

1 17. The Web server of claim 16 further comprising a notification engine configured to
2 provide notification messages to the customer and the vendors as appropriate, upon an
3 indication that at least one of the instances of the task description has been modified in some
4 way.

1 18. The Web server of claim 17 further comprising one or more vendor-specific interfaces
2 through which vendor-specific ones of the instances of the task description are provided to
3 the vendors.

1 19. The Web server of claim 18 further comprising a customer interface through which a
2 common customer view of one or more of the vendor-specific instances of the task
3 description are provided.

1 20. The Web server of claim 19 wherein the customer interface is configured to allow a
2 comparison of the one or more vendor-specific instances of the task description.

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